

Message Text

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S E C R E T JAKARTA 04251

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FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY HOLBROOKE FROM NEWSOM

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, ID

SUBJECT: INDONESIAN BAN ON NEWSWEEK MAGAZINE

1. I SEE NO PROBLEM IN YOUR RAISING NEWSWEEK QUESTION WHEN YOU ARE HERE. I BELIEVE YOU SHOULD BE AWARE THAT, IN SOME RESPECTS, CHRISTOPHER'S LETTER OVERDRAWS PICTURE. NEWSWEEK CASE HAS SPECIAL ASPECTS.

2. IT IS VIRTUAL CODE OF CURRENT JOURNALISM IN JAKARTA THAT ONE CAN TALK FAIRLY FREELY ABOUT PROBLEMS, BUT ATTACKS ON PERSONALITIES, AND PARTICULARLY PRESIDENT AND FAMILY, ARE TABOO. WHILE NEWSWEEK ARTICLE WAS IN MANY WAYS ACCURATE AND BALANCED, TWO ASPECTS CAUSED SERIOUS OFFENSE AND STRONGER THAN USUAL REACTION: (1) REFERENCES TO MRS. SUHARTO AS "MADAME FIFTY-FIFTY" (AMONG OTHERS); AND (2) COVER PICTURE OF PRESIDENT WITH CAPTION "FADING HOPES" WENT THROUGHOUT ASIA. FACT THAT COVER STORY WENT OUT ONLY IN ASIAN EDITION, ALSO WAS SEEN BY SOME AS EFFORT TO EMBARRASS PRESIDENT IN OWN BACK YARD.

3. MANY PUBLICATIONS, INCLUDING PRESS IN INDONESIA, HAVE ATTACKED CORRUPTION AND OTHER ASPECTS REGIME, BUT WITHOUT WHAT ARE CONSIDERED FIENDISH AND PERSONAL INSULTS. FAR EAST SECRET

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ECONOMIC REVIEW AND ASIAN WALL STREET JOURNAL HAVE BOTH BEEN VERY FRANK, BUT, WHILE INDIVIDUAL ARTICLES MAY FROM TIME TO TIME BE CENSORED, NEITHER PUBLICATION HAS BEEN BANNED. PRESIDENT HAS JUST GIVEN INTERVIEW TO ROY ROWAN OF TIME, THE THIRD ONE OVER A THREE-YEAR PERIOD. NEW YORK TIMES AND WASHINGTON POST CORRESPONDENTS HAVE BOTH BEEN ADMITTED RECENTLY, DESPITE ANGER OVER PALAPA STORY IN NEW YORK TIMES.

4. AS YOU MAY KNOW, INDONESIAN PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE IN NEW YORK, AMBASSADOR SANI, MET WITH CHRISTOPHER AND APPARENTLY WORKED OUT ARRANGEMENT BY WHICH NEWSWEEK WOULD APOLOGIZE. AFTER THIS PRESIDENT SUHARTO WAS TO AGREE TO GIVE INTERVIEW TO NEWSWEEK AND, IF INTERVIEW WAS SATISFACTORY, BAN WAS TO BE LIFTED. NEWSWEEK APOLOGIZED BUT PRESIDENT'S ADVISORS, PARTICULARLY ADMIRAL SUDOMO, HAVE APPARENTLY ADVISED AGAINST INTERVIEW. CHRISTOPHER IS APPARENTLY CORRECT IN HIS ASSESSMENT THAT THERE ARE DIFFERENT SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT.

5. I HAVE CONTINUED TO SPEAK TO MINISTERS ABOUT THEIR HANDLING OF US PRESS AND HAVE IMPRESSION THEY ARE SEEKING TO IMPROVE INDONESIAN IMAGE THROUGH BETTER TREATMENT OF FOREIGN JOURNALISTS. HOW FAR THIS WILL GO REMAINS TO BE SEEN.

6. IF YOU HAVE CHANCE TO TALK TO CHRISTOPHER, YOU MAY WHICH TO CONFIRM WHETHER INTERVIEW PART OF OUR INFORMATION IS CORRECT. AS I SAY, I SEE NO PROBLEM WITH RAISING NEWSWEEK ISSUE BUT I BELIEVE WE SHOULD BE AWARE THAT THERE WERE SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES HERE AND WE SHOULD NOT MAKE OVERLY DRAMATIC ASSUMPTION ABOUT EFFECT ON OTHER PUBLICATIONS.

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